

One-Liners . . . That Changed My Life!

18 *“Is it ethical?”*

At the outset of our first final exam in Law School, the professor startled us by handing out the test questions and announcing that he was leaving the room while we took the test. He explained, in effect, “You will be in charge of the justice system of the state of Kansas. You must learn now to police yourselves, because it is up to lawyers to keep each other honest. If we can’t trust you during examinations, you will never be able to do it later when you are in charge!”

In those earlier years, our code of ethics was summarized on one sheet of paper, posted on a wall in the office. It was best characterized by a story told about an older, respected attorney who was asked to attend a firm meeting about some matter and determine, *“Is it ethical?”* He entered the room and announced, in essence, “If we have to meet to talk about whether it is ethical, then we won’t do it.” That’s ethics!

Although there have been many advancements in the intervening years, e.g. more racial justice, it has been heartbreaking to see the gradual erosion of many moral and ethical standards and principles. As someone has noted, “The unthinkable becomes thinkable; the thinkable becomes doable; and the doable becomes the norm!”

It helped when we had a culture that wanted to do right. Since that is fading, the old lawyer’s conclusion is still a good standard for me: “If there is a question, we won’t do it”

From Grandpa With Love

A Note From the Writer

Moving into my nineties caused me to reminisce. It was eye-opening to realize how much I had been changed by one-liners. I decided some of these might give others a new insight or a chuckle, so—enjoy! You can reproduce this material, provided the copies are complete, including this copyright note, and circulated free of charge. © 2016 Marvin J. Martin